

Maureen McDonnell
Partnership for Military Families – 10/20/2010
Draft 5 (Video)

- Good morning everyone. As the Senior Military Advisor to the Governor and on behalf of First Lady Maureen McDonnell. I am honored to be speaking before you today.
- The Governor and First Lady greatly appreciate the work you are doing to make certain that every young child in Virginia is ready to learn in school, prepared to succeed in life, and equipped to contribute to our quality of life here in the great Commonwealth of Virginia.
- Each of you know the struggles that many families face in finding high quality affordable childcare, pre-school, healthcare, and other early development opportunities for our children.
- In Virginia, we are heartened by the fact that each of you is working to change that.
- The Secretary of Education, Gerard Robinson, and the President of the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, Scott Hippert are leading the Early Childhood Advisory Council, such that State and community leaders ensure that Virginia is doing the best job it can for our young children.
- Opportunities for high quality early childhood development are growing because of the ever expanding Virginia Star Quality Initiative, a partnership between the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation and Virginia's Office of Early Childhood Development.
- With support from the General Assembly and coordination from the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, Smart Beginnings communities are bringing together resources and programs at the local and regional level to support our young children.
- At the state level, agencies are working together to promote school readiness.

- The main reason I am here today is to let you know that your work not only has our attention, but is getting national attention as well – particularly at the Department of Defense.
- This brings me to a special announcement that will positively impact thousands of Virginia families who serve our country in the armed forces.
- Because Virginia has taken a lead role in early childhood activities and due to your tremendous work to move Virginia forward in early childhood development, the Department of Defense has chosen Virginia as one of 13 states with whom they will partner to make certain that the young children of Virginia's military families gain increased access to the highest quality early development opportunities possible.
- Under this partnership the Department of Defense will fund a State Child Care Liaison for the Commonwealth. This early childhood expert will work hand in hand with the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, state agencies, and each of your Smart Beginnings communities to bring even greater effectiveness to our early childhood work, particularly when it benefits the children of our women and men in uniform.
- As you may know, the U.S. Military has one of the highest quality early childhood development programs in the world. By bringing their experience to Virginia we will increase the quality of community based early learning and make certain that military children have the best opportunities to succeed in school and in life. Through this effort, young children of civilian families will benefit as well.
- Like everything else in our early childhood world, this is partnership involves both the public and private sectors of the Commonwealth working with the Department of Defense. It's a win/win partnership whereby Virginia can benefit from the experience and resources provided by the Department of Defense, while other states that host large military populations can learn valuable lessons from Virginia.
- The children of our service men and women are the small, quiet heroes of the freedoms we wake up to every morning.

- The project will also focus attention on the challenges military families face with childcare and in transitioning their children from school system to school system as the parent is either deployed or re-assigned.
- So many of our military families, especially those who live off base, are not able to take advantage of on-base child care. This project will provide support so military families can take advantage of off-base child care. We will be able to leverage resources to increase the number of centers enrolled under the Virginia Star Quality Initiative thus improving child care for all our children.
- We have the most prepared military in the world, why shouldn't the children of our servicemen and women be prepared as they begin school.
- You see, so often, especially during a crisis, we think of the soldiers, sailors, marines and air men...
- As we should.
- But we all know, that the great people in our military perform best when they know their children are being cared for back home.
- And that is why the First Lady wants to dedicate this Commonwealth to treating our military children and families with the deep appreciation & care that they also deserve.
- She wants to make sure that Virginia's military families know that there is a military family in the Governor's Mansion.
- She and the Governor care about them... because they know, *firsthand*, what they are going through.
- And they will be there for them, every step of the way.
- Everywhere the First Lady goes she *reminds* people to look out for the military families in our communities.
- *She looks at her time as your First Lady as an opportunity...*

An opportunity... to ensure that military families, especially the children, know that the Commonwealth truly appreciates their sacrifice, and will be there to help them in every way they need;

- Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today, thank you for your incredible work to make Virginia an even better place to raise children, and thank you for all you are doing to strengthen Virginia's economic prosperity, long into the future.
- On behalf of the Governor and First Lady, thank you for all you do to support Virginia's youth.
- Lastly, we thank the Department of Defense and the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation for forming this new partnership that will strengthen the lives of our children and contribute to a stronger and more secure nation.

Thank you!